

Holiday Tipping

What do bartenders, babysitters, and prostitutes have in common? Two things: Many of them receive holiday gratuities. Holona Ochs, a political science professor and researcher at Lehigh University in Pennsylvania, studies the topic of tipping, and she takes her work seriously – she interviewed more than 425 tip-earners in 50 careers. She found that tips are generally a weak signal of quality of service. People appear to tip rather for social and emotional reasons. In other words, we tip because we care about how others perceive us.” And that’s why tipping is perhaps the most stressful way we spend small amounts of money. Think about it: Buying a house and a car are stressful because the sums are huge, but when have you ever spent more mental energy deciding how to spend \$5? Answer: When you’re deciding how much to tip the waitress at your local Chili’s.

It’s even worse around the holidays, Ochs says, because we play mind games with ourselves: Does the nanny or dog walker or paperboy expect a tip? If so, how much is enough? What will they think of me if I give too much or too little? Psychology definitely comes into play, Ochs says. If you go to Emily Post’s Guide for Holiday Tipping for tip guidance at <http://www.emilypost.com/holiday-a-celebrations> , you’ll find an astounding number of people you’re “supposed” to tip, along with equally jaw-dropping amounts. Simply peruse the list below from her website and you’ll quickly see how expensive it can be.

<u>Service Provider</u>	<u>Options</u>	<u>Suggested Amount or Gift</u>
Au pair or live-in nanny	Cash or consider a gift. This person works closely with your family and you probably know them well.	One week’s pay and a gift from your child(ren).
Regular babysitter	Cash	One evening’s pay and a small gift from your child(ren).
Day care provider	Cash or a gift for each staff member who works with your child(ren).	A gift from you or \$25-\$70 for each staff member and a small gift from your child(ren).
Live-in help (nanny, cook, butler, housekeeper)	Cash and a personal gift	One week to one month of pay as a cash tip, plus a gift from you.
Private nurse	Gift	A thoughtful gift from you.
Home health employees	Check with agency first about gifts or tipping policies. If there is a no gifts/tipping policy, consider a donation to the agency.	A thoughtful gift from you. (If gift-giving is not against company policy.)
Housekeeper/Cleaner	Cash and/or a gift	Up to the amount of one week’s pay and/or a small gift.
Nursing home employees	A gift (not cash). Check company policy first.	A gift that could be shared by the staff (flowers or food items).
Barber	Cash or gift	Cost of one haircut or a gift.
Beauty salon staff	Cash or gift depending on whether you tip well after each service.	The cost of one salon visit divided for each staff member who works with you. Give individual cards or a small gift each for those who work on you.
Personal trainer	Cash or gift	Up to the cost of one session or a gift.
Massage therapist	Cash or gift	Up to the cost of one session or a gift.
Pet groomer	Cash or gift (if the same person grooms your pet all year).	Up to the cost of one session or a gift.
Dog walker	Cash or gift	Up to one week’s pay or a gift.
Personal caregiver	Cash or gift	Between one week to one month’s salary or a gift.
Pool cleaner	Cash or gift	The cost of one cleaning to be split among the crew.
Garage attendants	Cash or small gift	\$10-30 or a small gift
Newspaper delivery person	Cash or small gift	\$10-30 or a small gift
Mail carrier	Small gift only	Please see below for a detailed description of the United States Postal Service’s gift regulations.*
Package deliverer	Small gift only, no cash. (Only if you receive regular deliveries.)	Small gift in the \$20 range. Most delivery companies discourage or prohibit cash gifts.
Superintendent	Cash or gift	\$20-80 or a gift
Doorman	Cash or gift	\$15-80. \$15 or more each for multiple doormen, or a gift.

<u>Service Provider</u>	<u>Options</u>	<u>Suggested Amount or Gift</u>
Elevator operator	Cash or gift	\$15-40 each
Handyman	Cash or gift	\$15 to \$40
Trash/Recycling collectors	Cash or gift (for private) check city regulations if it is a municipal service.	\$10-30 each
Yard/Garden worker	Cash or gift	\$20-50 each
Teachers	Gift (not cash)	A small gift or note from you as well as a small gift from your child.

To her credit, Ms. Post doesn't claim the above amounts and those receiving them are all mandatory. Nor, obviously, would anyone have that many people on their "must tip" list. (Elevator operator? Who has an elevator operator?) Still, that's a potentially staggering number of people to take care of. There's no reason to stress out about holiday tipping. Here are some simple ideas that can make the process easier.

- (1) **Be greedy with your gratuities.** Ochs estimates that 90 percent of Americans tip, but they have no clue what they're doing. She calls it our biggest "unregulated form of commerce." So do yourself a favor and remember that you're spending money for a service just as if you were buying a gallon of milk. So save your best tips for those people you'll see again and often. That means being fair but frugal with wait staff at a holiday dinner out, but more generous when the paperboy leaves that envelope with the morning paper – because those extra bucks should mean your paper stays dry and near the front door.
- (2) **Figure out who to tip – and how much.** Ochs research shows, "Nannies, housekeepers, and dog walkers get few tips during the year other than the holidays, and even postal workers report receiving gifts. Sanitation workers and teachers say they are likely to also receive a holiday gift." How much? Here's a good – and accepted – rule of thumb: A generous holiday tip should be no more than the cost of one service. So that means tip your regular babysitter the equivalent of one night's pay. Or your favorite hair stylist gets the equivalent of one regular cut. As for that paperboy (or more likely these days, an adult who delivers multiple publications) a \$10 or \$20 bill is considered the low and high end of acceptability.
- (3) **Set a budget.** You set a budget for everything else. So if you can't afford to tip everyone, don't. For instance, if your hair stylist owns the salon, no need for a holiday gratuity. And if you're a generous tipper the rest of the year, don't feel pressured - just a few bucks extra gets the thought across and keeps the good service coming. For the rest, get creative ...
 - If you have friends who frequent the same salon, use the same babysitter, or have their kids enrolled in the same daycare, consider pooling your tips. Especially in this economy, the communal tip is understood and accepted.
 - If you can bake, make cookies. If you can't, buy a card. If you have a gift card someone gave you, and you know you aren't going to use it, pass it on and make it work for you.
 - Once you exceed your budget, don't ignore the people you appreciate. A simple holiday thank you can go a long way.
 - Remember what Ochs' research concluded: "The standards for holiday tipping are especially discretionary and are transmitted primarily experientially." Whatever that means.

[Source: Money Talks Brandon Ballenger 6 Jul 2011 ++]